



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS & THE
ENVIRONMENT

&

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

CONTINUATION OF THE JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS' CLEANUP OF
WORLD WAR I MUNITIONS IN THE SPRING
VALLEY AREA

TESTIMONY OF

GREGG A. PANE, MD
DIRECTOR
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wednesday, November 17, 2004
The John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Good afternoon, distinguished Chairs of the Public Works and Environment and Human Services Committees, residents of Spring Valley, concerned activists, community partners and colleagues present today. My name is Dr. Gregg A. Pane, Director for the District of Columbia Department of Health. I am very pleased to provide testimony before you today on the massive World War I munitions clean up taking place in the Spring Valley section of our nation's capitol. This is one of the most important environmental issues facing the District of Columbia today. It deserves our continued attention, and the residents of Spring Valley, longtime and committed participants in the community, deserve effective leadership and support on this matter. Later on today, following this hearing, I will also testify before the Public Works and Environment Committee's hearing on the health impacts of Washington Aqueduct's proposed disposal of solids from its water treatment process. This issue, as well, will deal with many topics addressed in the Spring Valley controversy.

It goes without saying that I am very new to this city and this great agency. However, since my recent appointment as Director of the Department of Health, I have made very swift and aggressive changes at every level of the largest local agency within District government. These changes seek to

restructure the agency in such a way that it is much more responsive to the needs of residents on issues such as that which impacts the Spring Valley area of our city. Therefore, we are implementing a significant culture change within the Department. It is a culture that will encourage increased collaboration with community groups in Spring Valley who are concerned about the lasting impact of hazardous waste contamination from military munitions. It is a culture that reflects the Mayor's undying commitment to Spring Valley families and their health while securing the integrity of their natural environment through continued monitoring and partnerships. These partnerships are not only essential with the community, but they must meet full circle with federal oversight agencies such as the EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

My initial examination of the Spring Valley cleanup finds us in a deadlock with residents on perceived goals festered by an uncomfortable, and understandable, level of mistrust. There must be a major shift in how we approach this problem and how we approach it *together* – not as competing interests all working in isolated perspectives, but as a solid and combined continuum of agencies, environmental groups, regulators, and other

stakeholders who are all working together toward the common goal of restoration.

In the wake of discovering the Army's World War I Spring Valley experiments, there still exists a bevy of concerns surrounding the potential health impact. From the recent article in the *Northwest Current* to questions that continually arise at restoration advisory board meetings, the multitude of concerns expressed by Spring Valley residents is increasingly evident, triggered by a visible fear for the community's safety and health. This overwhelming sense of fear leads to a dominating perception that the agencies involved in the clean-up effort - the Corps of Engineers, the EPA and the Department of Health - have not done enough to address these concerns and more.

The Department of Health, along with our federal partner known as the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), has collaborated with ATSDR on three exposure investigations where biological samples were collected:

- An investigation of children enrolled at the American University Child Development Center;

- An investigation of adults who resided on properties in Spring Valley where arsenic soil levels were highest;
- The third exposure investigation was completed during the summer months when arsenic contaminated soil was removed from yards and when residents were expected to spend more time outdoors. The Department of Health also conducted studies of the incidence and mortality of cancers known to be associated with arsenic exposure. We conducted two comparison studies of cancer statistics, each focused on the incidence and mortality of cancers caused by arsenic exposure.

None of the exposure investigations or studies of cancer statistics suggest Spring Valley residents have been exposed to arsenic that has increased their risk of cancer incidence or mortality.

A fourth exposure investigation was conducted by American University, a long-time neighbor and institutional presence in Spring Valley that is concerned with the potential impact on its students and workers. The subjects of these studies were individuals whom were determined to possess the greatest potential for arsenic exposure.

All investigations and studies were reviewed by the Mayor's Spring Valley scientific advisory panel. It was concluded that none of the results indicated an undue exposure to arsenic that was associated with adverse health effects.

Continuing a commitment to environmental health and the protection of residents in Spring Valley, the DOH examined drinking water data for unusually high levels of arsenic. Our review showed that arsenic levels in drinking water never exceeded 4 parts per billion – this is well under the national standard of 50 parts per billion set by federal regulators. Our epidemiological review of cancer statistics and biological samples taken from Spring Valley residents does not suggest that arsenic exposure has occurred at levels associated with adverse health effects. Also, sampling has shown that arsenic is the only chemical of concern in the Spring Valley soil.

Although we are not finding *scientific* evidence of a public health threat in Spring Valley, that does not diminish the concerns of residents and the disturbing results of a recent survey conducted by the *Northwest Current*. Despite the results of exposure investigations and aggressive multi-agency monitoring by the DOH, ATSDR, the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers, questions still persist. Because of this, I have determined that the Department of Health must assume a more active role in responding to the community's health concerns in Spring Valley. We must be able to assure a timely and comprehensive response to community needs on all health related issues, regardless of the differences that remain concerning our assessment of the situation. Upon identifying available resources within the Department, we must establish clear lines of communication between our agency and the community.

The Spring Valley project is complicated and controversial abound with questions regarding the Corps of Engineers' investigation and cleanup. Because of its complexity, missteps are inevitable - some major, and some minor. And those mistakes are glaringly reported in the press without a need for details at this moment. However, our focus as an agency is to minimize those mistakes and their effects. In each case, the Corps admits an error and attempts to correct it. They have reviewed the circumstances of each mistake and proposed ways to ensure that it won't happen again.

Many procedures and lines of communication have been strengthened among the higher levels of partnering agencies – the Department of Health,

EPA and the Corps. As the Colonel explains, the Corps has also established a formal, facilitated partnering process to ensure that all issues will be discussed openly; that plans will be reviewed and discussed by all partners; that the Corps will not act unless consensus has been reached among all partners; and that all decisions are properly documented. It has also established a formal hierarchy that properly relays disagreements and policy questions through an efficient chain of command. This process has been in effect since earlier this year and we are very pleased by its progress. In addition, minutes of all meetings and subsequent decisions are posted on the Corps' Spring Valley web site. Considering the complexity of the project, the many challenges of regulatory and political oversight and the limited resources available, we feel the Corps is performing exceptionally well.

The Department of Health should not only respond to Spring Valley's concerns – The Department of Health's mission is to *serve* the public health and, thereby, provide leadership on the best course of action.

To achieve this goal, I am today announcing the appointment of our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Walter Faggett, seated here beside me, as this agency's official health liaison to Spring Valley. Dr. Faggett will report directly to

me and will act as a continuing representative to all the agencies and groups associated with this project, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the EPA, the ATSDR, the Mayor's scientific advisory panel and the Spring Valley restoration advisory board. He/she will be responsible for developing procedures to ensure that all health related information is collected and dealt with properly, including a 24-hour hotline specifically designed to address community complaints, concerns and reports.

At the DOH, we eagerly await the health consultation report currently being prepared by ATSDR and expected early next year. We are confident this report will establish a scientific baseline upon which we can dialog with all interested parties, thereby answering many of the questions Spring Valley residents have regarding their health. As Colonel Davis of the Corps of Engineers asserts in his testimony, the partners have already commenced the development of a Spring Valley Health Initiative. The Department of Health, as the District's lead public health agency, intends to assume a very large role in that process.

The Department of Health pledges to continue frequent monitoring with scientific-based reports and updates provided when necessary. We will also

establish a surveillance system with assistance from ATSDR to characterize suspected cases of arsenic-related diseases/conditions. Thank you for this opportunity. We look forward to working closely with the Council and community partners on this issue and are available to answer any questions you have today.